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PROGRAM Crossfire

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SUBJECT Arkady Shevchenko

ANNOUNCER: Crossfire. On the left, Tom Braden. On the right, Robert Novak. In the crossfire, Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko.

TOM BRADEN: Good evening and welcome to Crossfire.

If you had an opportunity to sit down for a chat with a high-ranking Soviet defector, you would doubtless have a lot of questions. Arkady Shevchenko is the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect. Until he decided upon breaking with Moscow -- that's the title of his book -- he was a protege of Andrei Gromyko and the trusted agent of Soviet foreign policy as Undersecretary General of the United Nations.

So, pull up a chair and let's get quickly to the questions.

ROBERT NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, I think a lot of ordinary Americans have one question they'd like to ask you. And put bluntly, it's this: Why are you alive? When you consider the fate of Mr. Trotsky in Mexico City and of Soviet defectors, you, the highest defector, why didn't the KGB do you in?

ARKADY SHEVCHENKO: Trotsky was alive for a long period of time. And even it was Stalin, and the Soviets were much more arrogant in their operations on American or Mexican soil with something like that.

They can get me. There's no question about that. And I think times have changed. And the Moscow people, the KGB or politicians, you know, it's [unintelligible] worthwhile to do something against me and to have another outcry like Korean

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airplane. I don't claim that it would be such a thing, but still it can be. Whether is there a plus or minuses for them.

BRADEN: But is the CIA protecting you?

SHEVCHENKO: I would say that the proper arrangements are being made and I have a protection.

NOVAK: Do you live in a state of fear of any day...

SHEVCHENKO: No, I don't.

NOVAK: You don't.

SHEVCHENKO: No, I don't live in a state of fear. You would be mad if you lived in a state of fear.

There is a danger. It's another thing. We have to distinct clearly between fear and -- I used to. I used to during the period when I had the cooperation with the American intelligence for years. It was a constant fear which was even greater than now.

BRADEN: Mr. Shevchenko, you describe that fear very capably in your book, Breaking with Moscow. But I wondered about the time when you were caught, or you were apparently caught. You got a telegram asking you to come home and answer, quote, certain questions, unquote. And that put you on your guard, to the extent that you went to your contacts in the American intelligence service and said, "I got to get out of here now."

How do you think you got caught?

SHEVCHENKO: I think it happened between February and April of '78, because the Soviet government extended my contract with the United Nations in February. And it was instructions given to the Soviet mission signed by Gromyko. But during these few months, by doing something, the Soviets detected the leaks of information and what is the source, and they come to the source. And they were stupid to mention some other questions, because they knew that I can have a feel that it's no ground for consultations on the arms control things that were going on. And so they put other questions, which other questions would be -- I talked with Gromyko before about my new assignments or some of the things, whatever they wanted me to do. But I think they made a mistake.

NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, there's one thing I didn't quite understand. When you went to the American authorities, indicated you were intersted in defecting, you had no intention of doing

any kind of espionage work. Isn't that correct?

SHEVCHENKO: It's correct.

NOVAK: In your book, you imply that when this was suggested by the Americans, you were concerned that they might blackmail you on that. Isn't that correct? That you were concerned they might use the same tactics that the KGB did?

SHEVCHENKO: No. You know, of course I assumed that. After experience with the people, I can tell you that they're not like KGB. But I assumed everything what KGB is doing, that they can do, you see.

NOVAK: The question is, if you had said, "No. I am not going to do that. I just want to make a clean break," what do you think the CIA would have done?

SHEVCHENKO: I don't know what they could do, but I know what the KGB can do with that. Perhaps they would do nothing. With my experience now, I probably would say no, what I know now.

NOVAK: Are you happy that you did it this way rather...

SHEVCHENKO: I'm happy I did it this way because I think it was useful for the noble cause, for the purposes which are in the interest of this country. And looking, you know, in retrospect, I would say that it was worthwhile to do. I have no regrets that I did that.

Also, you know, being in this position, I don't know, forever, I mean, some people call me a spy or something. But do you call spies good Germans who had been under the Nazi regimes, and whether the German people now look at them as spies? Or who'd been helping us during the Second World War? There are noble causes, and I not consider myself...

BRADEN: Rolf von Falkenburg is not looked upon as a spy, I don't think.

Let me ask you, Mr. Shevchenko, however, it is the custom of the CIA to take defectors -- I don't think they've had a high one such as you since Mr. Penkovsky -- but to take defectors and put them through a very, very intensive grilling, sometimes lasting for months, and to hold them and to give them lie detector tests, and to not only grill them, but counter-grill them, to make absolutely sure that this defector is on the straight and narrow when he's defecting and that he's not going to be a double agent.

What did they do to you?

SHEVCHENKO: There was a difference with me because other defector come and just they didn't know why they come. They had to test them. But they test me for almost 2 1/2 years when I was already with them. They can check what information which I've given is correct or not. It was easy to do. So there was no necessity, after being with them for 2 1/2 years, to check me.

They didn't grill me. The only one thing that they insisted they wanted me to -- not to have an open life or not to be public. They wanted me in a secure house and all the thing, which was absolutely unacceptable for me, and I rejected that.

BRADEN: How about your security in the future? Did the CIA offer you a lifetime income?

SHEVCHENKO: Oh, no. I make my income. You know, the CIA would not be able to provide income which I do myself and...

BRADEN: Oh, I realize you'll make some money on your book and you're making money lecturing, but...

SHEVCHENKO: No, no, no, no, no.

BRADEN: But look, you've got a whole life to lead, many, many years to lead in this country. How are you going to be sure that you're secure?

SHEVCHENKO: I'm using -- oh, yes. I'm pretty sure that I'm secure because my lecturing is quite successful. I make some investments, and it will last, I'm sure, for quite a while. There is book, and I am writing another book now. And I'm teaching. And there is quite a possibility that I can be a scholar somewhere to have a job. Not with the government.

NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, there's a couple things in your book that you implied but didn't say. Do you think the KGB really had a responsibility for the death of the U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold in the plane crash in Africa?

SHEVCHENKO: I cannot be absolutely sure. What I put in the book is true, because it's in direct source, you know. It's a conversation.

NOVAK: But what's your opinion? What's your opinion? You think they did it?

SHEVCHENKO: Not themselves. They did it through other people, like they don't want themselves -- their hands. And they always try to find someone to do that.

NOVAK: Do you think that the KG -- you say the KGB --

you heard Soviet officials saying they wish Anwar Sadat was dead. Do you think they had a part in his assassination?

SHEVCHENKO: I don't think so, because they wanted that much earlier. And it happened, I think, that Sadat had a position, and I don't think really that...

NOVAK: This last one happened after you left, but do you think the KGB was instrumental in the attempted assassination of the Pope? What's your opinion?

SHEVCHENKO: They might be. They are not -- it happened, you're right, after I defected. But if it would be a proof, a real proof that the Bulgarians are involved, behind them are Soviets. This is no question.

BRADEN: Okay. And on that question, which brings up another one which is of concern to a lot of Americans, do you think that the Soviet Union deliberately shot down a plane that it knew was carrying civilian passengers, or do you think they made a mistake?

SHEVCHENKO: They made a mistake. The Soviet leadership would not do that. And it's a mistake -- first of all, the paranoia over security of their borders. There are standing instructions for their military who were handling that at that time. And it's not so easy to get all Politburo to decide on all the things.

The military, of course, the local people there, they come to Moscow. Possibly Ustinov knew, or Ogarkov most likely was the last man. I don't exclude that they talked with Andropov. I don't know whether he was -- that he -- if you want my opinion, if Gromyko was asked whether to do or not in enough time, he would stop it.

NOVAK: Who's running the show in Moscow right now?

SHEVCHENKO: There are five or six people who are running the show.

NOVAK: Not Chernenko, surely.

SHEVCHENKO: Oh, yes, sure. You know, he never run the show. He was selected by a group of people who considered that he can be a man whom they can handle him. He could be a figure-head person. It's a generational problem. They considered that also this man is not a first-rate intellect, to say it mildly.

BRADEN: Are we right in assuming that Gorbachev is the heir apparent?

SHEVCHENKO: There is no such a thing like heir apparent in the Soviet Union. And Americans have to understand that why Soviets don't do that. Because they're afraid if there would be heir apparent, it would be two center of power: one which is now and another one. It would be division in the Politburo, debates and all kinds of things. They would like to avoid that.

NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, there are people in this town, in the American government who I've talked to who feel that when Chernenko goes, which may be very soon, I guess, that the next Prime Minister will not be Gorbachev, but your old chief, Mr. Gromyko. Do you think that's possible?

SHEVCHENKO: It's possible. Gromyko had no interest, ever, in domestic affairs and the economy, which I put in my book, and everything. But he can do something like Molotov did when he was the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the same time, and some other people will deal with economic problem. And this is quite a realistic assessment for the future. It was sharing power. Let's say Gorbachev will become General Secretary of the party, and they will put old people in a position like --remember they set up -- it was after ouster of Khrushchev, when Kosygin was Prime Minister. Brezhnev initially didn't play a role which he played later. And that could be something, combination of that kind.

BRADEN: Okay, gentlemen. We have to stop for a minute. And when we get back, I want to ask Mr. Shevchenko about a quotation in his book. He says, "I witnessed participation in conspiracies to kill unsuitable political figures in other countries." I wonder who.

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NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, you say in your book that the Soviet leaders respect strength in their adversaries, their American adversaries. Do you think they respect Ronald Reagan as a strong adversary?

SHEVCHENKO: This is, of course, a respect mixed with hatred, definitely so, because they understand that what he's doing is really to revive a spirit of United States. What he's doing is telling the truth to the American people about the Soviet final objectives and everything, which, of course, I mean, something which the Soviet leadership don't like.

But I would not exclude at all that eventually if we will go in the future and if -- something, you know, can happen like with Richard Nixon, when the Soviets hated him, considered him anti-communist and so on. But finally, eventually, when they saw that there could be some arrangements or something being

they could respect him.

And they do -- I'm sure that they have respect for somebody who is really strong.

NOVAK: A lot of liberal, wringing their hands and crying, worry about Ronald Reagan calling the Soviet Union the evil empire threatening the nuclear holocaust. Do you think that makes any sense at all?

SHEVCHENKO: The Soviets -- in a certain way, the Soviet leadership, of course, is evil. I don't like to call all the Soviet Union or Russia the evil empire. The evil empire is the system.

NOVAK: I understand. I'm sorry. What my question was, do you think it makes any sense to think that President Reagan making that statement endangers world peace, would lead the Soviets to some rash act?

SHEVCHENKO: But what they're doing, I mean they're calling the United States, I mean, decaying capitalism and all kind of a thing. They do that from 1917, I mean. And some American Presidents just didn't, I mean, answer that. If they talk this language, if they use this language, why we should not?

NOVAK: So Ronald Reagan is a tougher cookie to deal with for the Soviets than Jimmy Carter.

SHEVCHENKO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Certainly. Jimmy Carter, you know, Jimmy Carter thought that the Soviets -- you can deal with the Soviets, people who can trust, I mean sincere. He opened his eyes only after the Afghanistan, you know. Before that, I mean, he really didn't understand the Soviets at all.

BRADEN: Were the Soviets pleased when Ronald Reagan did away with Jimmy Carter's grain embargo?

SHEVCHENKO: Oh, I'm sure of that, because they want to deal with the United States. They want the American credits. They want to have some technology from the United States. But in general, grain embargo didn't affect much the Soviet Union.

BRADEN: Let me bring you back to this quotation I mentioned earlier about your witnessing participation in conspiracies to kill -- it's your quote -- quote, unsuitable, unquote, political figures in other countries. Which ones?

SHEVCHENKO: I mentioned Anwar Sadat. I mentioned the Secretary, which he was...

BRADEN: Dag Hammarskjold?

SHEVCHENKO: Yes, Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary, was close to the Soviets. But when he changed his mind, they didn't like that. That's what I know. But I'm sure if there were these cases, they could think about other people.

BRADEN: One thing that interested me. Why did Gromyko, who was your colleague and your boss, and I think you were kind of a protege of his, why would he send you to the United Nations? What is important about the United Nations to the Soviet Union?

SHEVCHENKO: The importance is -- I don't like to talk much about that -- propaganda, using it as a center for the spying activities. It was very useful.

But he didn't send me. This position of the Undersecretary General of the United Nations was a cover, actually, for me. I was another ambassador in this country -- you know, I wrote in this book -- meeting with the people. Let's say with the Israeli Ambassador, with other people which would be...

BRADEN: But is the Soviet -- but what I'm getting at is this: Is the United Nations principally of use to the Soviet Union as a spy center?

SHEVCHENKO: Oh, yes. Oh, extremely useful.

BRADEN: Do you think it would be useful for us? Would it be in our own interest if we got out of it and asked it to get out of here?

SHEVCHENKO: No. No, I don't think so. Because with all the shortcomings, with all the bad things about the United Nations, still it's a meeting ground. Still, in certain situations, like Cyprus now, the presence of the United States [sic] troops there prevent a bloodshed. I don't know how many people would be killed there if not for the United Nations.

NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, reading your book, I got a little feeling of ambivalence toward the arms talks, that you felt that we should proceed with the arms talks. But yet, reading this, it seems to be that this was a device for Soviet power. Is that not correct?

SHEVCHENKO: It's not exactly so, because the Soviet leadership, even now, they have some interest in arms control negotiations.

NOVAK: On their terms.

SHEVCHENKO: On their terms, but they're ready to make some serious concessions, also. Because what is going on now in Moscow, and if you watch really what the Soviet leadership is

concerned is economy, Soviet economy. And they understand very well that if it would be a further competition, it would be real arms race, they have to spend even more than they do now. They cannot afford that.

BRADEN: Does the Soviet Union or the people of the Soviet Union with whom you associated on a high level in the Foreign Office, are they as concerned about the horrible possibilities of nuclear war as we are here?

SHEVCHENKO: Yes, they are.

BRADEN: They realize what can happen.

SHEVCHENKO: Yes, they realize what can happen.

BRADEN: Well, are they interested, then, and do you think the Soviet people are interested, in calling a halt to the arms race? Or is this -- is their real aim to achieve superiority over us?

SHEVCHENKO: No. The people of the Soviet Union, they don't want any kind -- achieve any superiority over us. There is no question about that. But the people, they are also concerned that they are afraid -- of course the Soviet Union is a little advanced in the civil defense programs, but still they cannot protect the population and industrial centers, or something like that.

NOVAK: Mr. Shevchenko, you've been on both sides now of this great competition for philosophy and what happens in the world. Who's going to win it down the line, in your opinion? Whitaker Chambers, who was a communist, then became an anti-communist, felt always that the communists would win in the end. Do you?

SHEVCHENKO: No. No. I don't think that they win, provided if the United States and the Western European allies of the United States will understand properly the Soviets, their objectives. And if we deal properly with the Soviet Union, they will fail eventually. Because the system which exists in the Soviet Union is against human nature. That's why it doesn't function.

They can last quite a long time, that's true. But I think they will fail. We will win.

BRADEN: One more question, quickly, because we're out of time. But your description of your departure from your wife was poignant. Do you really think that she was murdered back in Moscow?

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SHEVCHENKO: Yeah, I do believe in that, because she was a very strong woman, and I don't think, really, that she would commit a suicide. This was a story deliberately, I mean, spread as a kind of also a punishment for me.

BRADEN: All right, Mr. Shevchenko. We want to thank you for being our guest on Crossfire tonight.

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BRADEN: Bob, I doubt very much that the CIA will ever let Mr. Shevchenko fall upon hard times. But otherwise, I think we got a very honest report. Did it give you any hope?

NOVAK: Yes. I was very pleased when he didn't go the way of Whitaker Chambers and say the communists were going to win. And you must have been burning, Tom, when he said -- I thought I heard him say that Ronald Reagan was a pretty good fellow in dealing with the Soviets, and a devil of a lot better than your boy Jimmy Carter.

BRADEN: Well, Jimmy Carter wasn't my boy, old boy. But it is a fact, he also said, that the grain embargo was imposed by Carter and put back again by Reagan.

NOVAK: You put that in on him.

BRADEN: I put that in because you put it in.